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RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO PRIORITY 0880
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 OTTAWA 000270

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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MOPS](#) [AF](#) [CA](#)

SUBJECT: COMPROMISE AFGHAN MOTION SETS END DATE IN 2011

REF: Ottawa 0221

11. (SBU) Summary: In a new compromise motion, PM Harper acceded to the Liberals' call for a firm end date to the Afghan mission of Canadian Forces in Kandahar, with pull-outs beginning in July 2011 and ending by December 2011. The new language apparently draws heavily from the Liberals' amendments to the government's original motion (reftel), and may placate the opposition into supporting the motion or letting it pass when it comes to a vote in March. End Summary.

Olive branch to the Liberals

12. (U) In a well publicized speech to Canadian Conference of Defence Associations Institute on February 21 (with CENTCOM Commander Admiral Fallon in attendance), Prime Minister Stephen Harper described a revised motion that the government would introduce later that day in the House of Commons on the future of the Canadian Forces in Kandahar province of Afghanistan. He emphasized that the government's move sought to achieve a "bi-partisan consensus," building on the recommendations of the Manley Panel, and highlighted "fundamental common ground between the Government and the Official Opposition, particularly agreement that the mission should continue until 2011 and that operational decisions should be left to Canadian commanders on the ground in Afghanistan." He explicitly admitted that the new motion incorporated "large elements" of the Liberals' amendments. He insisted that NATO partners must nonetheless still find 1,000 more troops to support Canadian Forces in Kandahar, but made no reference to helicopters, UAVs, or other requirements.

13. (U) PM Harper explained that Canada now planned to notify NATO that in July 2011 its military deployments will begin to leave Kandahar, with the final pull-outs by December 2011. He insisted that a firm end date for the mission was neither a Liberal nor Conservative but rather a "Canadian" position. He confirmed that the government intends to hold a vote in the Commons on this motion before the NATO summit in April. PM Harper argued that Canada is making a "real and positive difference" in Afghanistan and emphasized an "unbreakable link" among security, development, and aid.

14. (U) PM Harper emphasized that, with its role in Afghanistan, Canada was honoring its tradition as a reliable and resolute ally in the quest for global security. Highlighting Canadian contributions in World Wars I and II, Korea as well as numerous peacekeeping operations, he emphasized that "the reality of our world" was the need for "peace enforcement missions" under UN Security Council Chapter VII authorizations, such as in Afghanistan. He noted that

"all Canadians" were proud of Canada as a force for "positive change" in the world, and insisted that Canada would always be ready to take up arms to defend its interests and values. He lamented that Canada had not always maintained the capacity to meet such security challenges, but described how his government had undertaken a major program to "build a first class modern military and keep it that way," which he said was "a duty we owe to our troops." Saying that Canada should be a world leader, not a follower, he asserted that Canada needs a credible military to be a "serious player" in the world. He laid out the government's commitment to raise the Qthe world. He laid out the government's commitment to raise the automatic annual increase in defense spending from 1.5 per cent to 2 per cent, beginning in 2011-12.

Debate to begin on February 25

15. (U) The government will table the text of the revised motion later on February 21 (although Parliament remains on recess) and will begin debate in the Commons when it resumes on February 25. Journalists who have seen the revised text said it followed the wording of the Liberals' amendment almost verbatim. With debates and votes on the budget coming first in early March, and an expected spring recess March 15-30, the next likely date for a vote on this motion is March 31.

Comment

16. (SBU) The Conservatives have moved significantly toward the Liberals' position, particularly on the question of a fixed end date for the Afghan mission. It will be all but impossible for the Liberals to refuse to support the motion, despite the slightly longer timeframe (the Liberals had wanted the pull-out to begin in

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February 2011 and to finish by July 2011) and failure to resolve differences in how to handle Afghan detainees in light of allegations of torture by Afghan authorities. The Conservatives likely still have a few surprises up their sleeves to sweeten the deal, probably an announcement before the vote on success in procuring helicopters and UAVs, and -- the government very much hopes -- on new commitments by NATO partners on additional troops.

WILKINS